

As Memorial Day approaches, it seems fitting that the name of Marshfield World War I hero, Sergeant Willard D. Purdy, be added to the roster of Marshfield's 150, Heroes and Leaders, Past and Present.

The July 1918 local newspapers reported Sergeant Purdy's death with the following notice:

"Another Marshfield young man has made the supreme sacrifice for his country. He is Willard Purdy, 23-year-old-son of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Purdy, East B Street, and a sergeant of Company A, 127th infantry, France, who died on July 4th as the result of an accidental explosion of a grenade. A message to that effect was received by his parents from the adjutant general's office in Washington, Friday.

The message read:

"Deeply regret to inform you that it is officially reported that Sergeant Willard Dealtion Purdy, infantry, died from accidental explosion of grenade July 4."

Additional details were provided in letters or visits home from fellow soldiers. A letter from Purdy's younger brother, Chester, to their parents dated July 11, 1918, provided additional information of Willard's death and funeral – as reported in the Marshfield Herald, August 17, 1918.

"Dear Mother – I haven't had a chance to write you a long letter since Willard's death. You see there is no censor here so the only time I can write is when I see one of the officers of our company.

"I am on detached duty now as a telephone and telegraph operator. Chester Freeman brought me this paper just now so I could write to you.

"Will explain the accident that caused Willard's death to you. He had been out with a scouting party and had just come in from "no man's land." All the boys carried their bombs in their shirt fronts. When Willard reached in to get his out the pin that held the igniter fell out from one—he had three in his shirt. He pulled out two but didn't get the right one. There were too many men around him to pull out his shirt and let the ignited bomb drop in the trench, so he cried to the men to run and hung on to all three bombs, bending over and holding them close to his body. He could probably have saved his own life if he had pulled out his shirt and let the bombs drop, but if he had done that it would surely have killed five or six of his comrades. He chose death rather than let his men get the fragments from the bursting bombs. All three bombs exploded. He didn't suffer much, which was merciful. It was a mighty heroic action, a thing I never would have the nerve to do.

"I attended the funeral and was never more proud of my brother. The French and soldiers of all nations present took off their helmets and saluted, as a marked honor to a man who was willing to, and did, die to save the life of his comrades. We are all mighty proud of him, but it would have been easier for us had he lived. I know it's heart-breaking mother, but you must



be as proud of being his mother as I am of being his brother. We were always together up to the time he got his new job. God bless him and keep him.

" You need not worry about me as my work keeps me back of the lines most of the time. I left the front lines on the Fourth, the morning after the accident. I have passed through one heavy shelling which lasted about an hour, but the Germans didn't profit by it, for they lost out, as they always do. Everything is being done here in American style, so the Germans are like rats in a trap, and they will have to give sooner or later. They are being whipped to a standstill. They are beat now but like fools they don't like to admit it.

"All the officers are very kind and have done more than their share to make things easier for me. Lieutenant Wallie Mueller has written to you, so you see we have the best officers.

"Well, mother, don't worry about me and when you think of Willard, think of the glory of his death—dying to save the life of his comrades."

Sergeant Purdy's remains returned to Marshfield on May 27, 1921. The body lay in state at the Willard D. Purdy School from the time of its arrival until interment in Flanders Field at Hillside Cemetery during the Memorial Day Services.

The following year Marshfield's Rotary Club and American Legion jointly sponsored the placement of a memorial monument at Flanders Field. The 3-sided granite memorial forms the base of the 75-foot flagstaff. It bears the following inscription: "Dedicated by the people of Marshfield to the memory of those who gave their lives for America's Cause during "the World War." The list carries these names:

George Arnett	Jos. C. Marsh Jr.	Barney Skaya
William Arnett	Harold Mattson	Walter H. Soles
Louis Binder	Mike J. Miller	Joseph Stangl
Frank Boyer	Earnest G, Miller	Cecil G Tormey
Frederick W. Breseman	Frank J Mueller	Nick Trierweiler
Ray Firnstahl	Emil Oertel	Wesley C. Van Vooheis
John A Fisher	Harry M Palmer	Everett L. Varney
Louis Fleisner	Edward J Parks	Henry Wallis
Fred E Hintz	W. Simon Petri	Nick A Weigel
Harold Jaeckel	Joseph Ponczoch	Lois Wellner
Louis Kelnhofer	Willard D. Purdy	Cooper D. Wells
Otto H. Kops	William J. Reithus	George W Whitney
Floyd M Laird	Henry Schielz	Ray Winch
William Lee.	George A. Schiesl	Franklin Wood
Wm. J. Lesselyong	Edward Schultz	Ivo E. Wright
Leo Lutz	Paul H. Schultz	Herbert Yaeger
Louis A Mangold	Louis A. Seidl	